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SUBJECT: Parliamentary Elections: Ominous Signs for U.S.-French Ag Relations

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11. Summary: Surprisingly strong showings by both President Sarkozy's UMP party (28 percent) and the Greens (16 percent) are likely to have negative implications for the U.S. regarding France's direction on a range of agricultural issues including biotechnology, multilateral trade negotiations and France's effectiveness in pushing its agenda on "societal concerns" at the EU level. Ag Minister Barnier, who headed the UMP ticket and easily won election, is now well positioned to become a key EU Commissioner in the fall (possibly getting the agricultural portfolio). During the French EU presidency, he emerged as the leading proponent of the idea that societal concerns and European Preference should be trade policy criteria. Anti-biotech activist Jose Bove won a Parliamentary seat on the Green ticket, effectively giving him immunity from prosecution and sentencing for several biotech crop destructions in France. End summary

12. (SBU) The robust showings by both the ruling UMP party and the Green party (effectively challenging the Socialists for second place), are widely viewed as a mandate for continuation and even strengthening of the GOF's aggressive environmental agenda under the super-ministry headed by Jean-Louis Borloo, the third ranking member of the Sarkozy government. (The Green party ticket included anti-biotech activist Jose Bove, whose successful bid to become a parliamentarian effectively gives him immunity from prosecution and sentencing for several biotech crop destructions.) One notable aspect of the "green" agenda is France's populist approach to biotechnology. The Sarkozy government's dissolution of the previous competent biotech authority, composed largely of geneticists, and its replacement by an authority composed of both a scientific and a socio-ethical committee, led to a moratorium on biotech cultivation in France. The election results can only reaffirm France's resolve to export this socially-oriented model for biotech decision making to the EU level, and to continue its campaign to marshal political opposition to the 10-year reauthorization of the one corn variety (Mon 810) currently approved for planting in the EU.

13. (SBU) In the area of international trade policy, a Green Party representative, in articulating the party's position at a press conference given by the Agricultural Chamber, stated firmly that the party believed that agriculture should be removed from the WTO. This is a belief that is shared by many of France's agricultural elite, and that could gain additional traction from the results of the election.

¶4. (SBU) In the wake of the European Parliamentary elections, Sarkozy said that Agriculture Minister Michel Barnier was at the top of France's proposed list of candidates as possible new EU commissioners. Barnier reportedly seeks several key posts (among which may be agriculture or trade). Sarkozy indicated that France and Germany had "in principle" agreed to support the other's candidate.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: We believe that as EU Commissioner, Barnier would undoubtedly continue to push his agenda to legitimize "societal concerns" and European Preference as criteria for EU ag trade policy decision making. As French minister of Agriculture, he already has employed this rationale to argue against the importation of a number of products including U.S. poultry subject to anti-microbial treatment.